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### Hotels upgrade connections to meet demand

*Andrew Kirk, OF THE RECORD STAFF*

Old motels can still be found boasting color television, and some hotel signs still offer HBO after nearly 20 years. Now, with all of the technological innovations of the past decade, free Wi-Fi has joined those amenities once called a luxury, but is now a requirement. Debbie Batt, marketing director for the Park City Marriott, said that in her experience it's really a phenomenon of the last six months.

"Right now the majority of travelers, whether they are individuals or groups, want Wi-Fi ? not only in the room but throughout the hotel including in meeting rooms," she said. "For most of 2009 we've had Wi-Fi, but we've been getting more comments in the last six months than ever."

To be more specific, guests want it included in the room rate. For many years hotels have offered the service, but for an additional fee ? around \$10 a day, she said. In the last six months the idea of paying extra has become unacceptable for guests.

As recently as last year, Batt believes a quality hotel could have gotten away without offering wireless access at all and just providing computer kiosks or a "business center" for guests' Internet-use needs. Just one year later it's a must-have, and it must be free, she said.

Sarah Myers, public relations manager for Stein Eriksen Lodge, said Wi-Fi is included in the room rate in all areas of the hotel for the first time this year. Previously it was free in common areas but a fee was charged for in-room use. Why the change? Guests demanded it, she said.

Bob Hughes, general manager for the Park City Peaks Hotel, pointed out an important distinction in the types of travelers wanting Wi-Fi. He caters mostly to leisure travelers, in contrast to business travelers. People on vacation are much less interested in having Internet access. They may check their email once a day if at all.

For these people, and the work-related travelers who stay with them, the free "business centers" that have become standard in hotels are more than adequate. Otherwise, guests are happy to pay a little extra for better access, he said.

Bed and breakfasts, like the Washington School Inn on Park Avenue, get mostly leisure travelers, but Brittany Holthus, innkeeper, said they offer Wi-Fi for free because it's easier than providing for guests' computer needs. Most people have their own devices now, whether it's a laptop or an iPhone, so it works better to accommodate them than to give guests access to the inn's computers.

She agreed with Batt that 2009 brought more inquiries about the service than ever before.

Steve Lindburg, general manager at the Dakota Mountain Lodge, believes competition with other hotels has driven the accessibility of Wi-Fi even more than guest requests.

Every hotel wants to give clients the impression they're doing everything they can to fulfill the needs of guests. Like color television and HBO, if everyone else is offering it, than your hotel better as well.

That desire also prompted the Dakota Mountain Lodge to include top-of-the-line Apple computers in its "business center" and Lindburg said that area has gotten more use than predicted and the staff has received very positive feedback about the choice of machines.

Chris Eggleton, general manager of **Newpark** Hotel, said guest demands determine what amenities become "standard," but it's making those amenities complimentary that is really the key to pleasing guests.

"Much like airlines and their dreaded 'baggage fees,' many hoteliers offer discount rates when booking, then hit guest with other fees at check-in," he said.

What is the next new technology likely to become standard in a hotel? iPod docks ? particularly in the alarm clocks.

Eggleton, Lindburg and Myers say they've got them already, while the others said they're coming very soon ? even at the Washington School Inn.

They're not demanded by guests, Myers said, but other places have them so visitors want them.

Lindburg added that visitors also want the latest technology and services in terms of on-demand movies as well as game consoles. Myers said guests at the Stein Eriksen Lodge have been requesting high definition flat-screen televisions. They already have flatscreens, but converting them all to high definition is going to be tricky, she said.

"It's difficult on a corporate level because each unit needs a scrambling box," she explained.

That requires negotiation with the cable companies. It's not going to be an easy amenity to provide, she explained, but it's one of the next needs of tech-savvy travelers seeking high-end accommodations.

[Photo:](#)

[The Park City Marriott s business center offers two computers for its guests to surf the Web. Tech-savvy travelers are requiring more amenities from their accommodations. Photo by Grayson West/ Park Record](#)

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